

# DICTIONARY



## NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020



## NATIONAL EXCLUSION POLICY

*What does it mean for the future of Indian students?*

a handbook from  
COLLECTIVE

# A Dictionary of National Education Policy 2020

a handbook from COLLECTIVE  
August 2020

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## List of Abbreviations

AICTE	All India Council for Technical Education
AIIMS	All India Institutes of Medical Sciences
AYUSH	Ayurveda, yoga & naturopathy, unani, sid-dha and homoeopathy
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
DU	University of Delhi
ECB	External commercial borrowings
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FYUP	Four year undergraduate programme
GDP	Gross domestic product
GER	Gross enrolment ratio
GST	Goods and services tax
HEI	Higher education institution
IISc	Indian Institute of Science
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
MCQ	Multiple choice questions
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**MOOC** Massive open online course  
**NAAC** National Assessment and Accreditation Council  
**NEP** National Education Policy  
**NIRF** National Institutional Ranking Framework  
**NRF** National Research Foundation  
**NTA** National Testing Agency  
**OBC** Other Backward Class  
**PwD** Person with Disabilities  
**RTE** Right to Education  
**SC** Scheduled Caste  
**ST** Scheduled Tribe  
**SWAYAM** Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds  
**U-DISE** Unified District Information System for Education  
**UGC** University Grants Commission of India  
**UN** United Nations

## Introduction

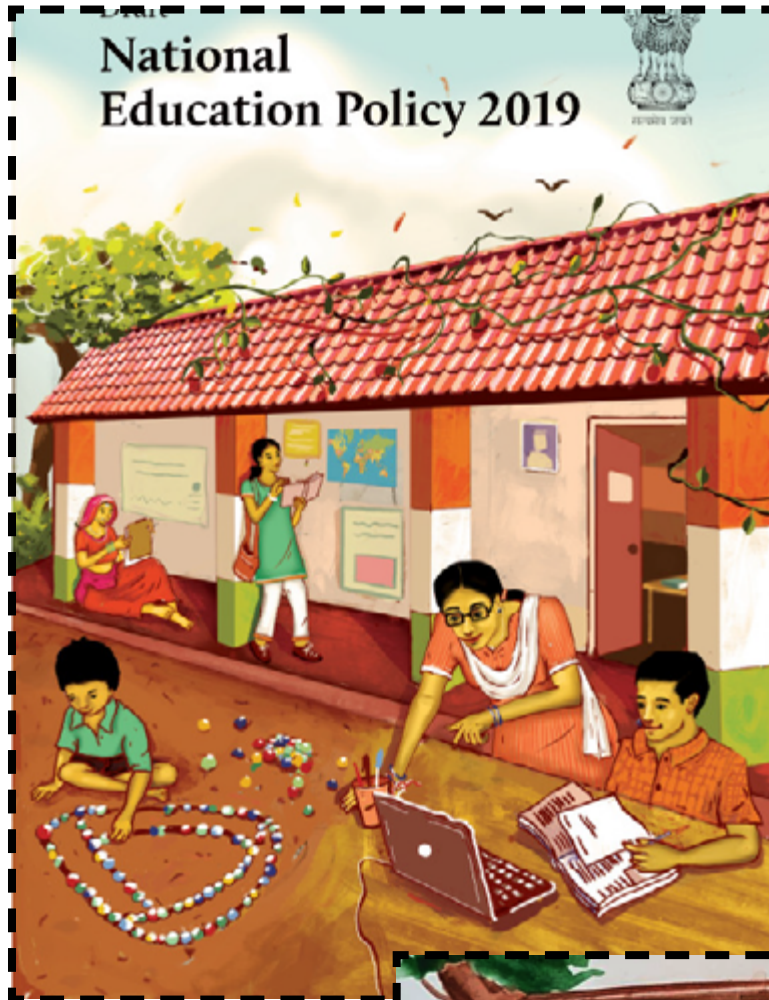
The cover image of the Draft National Education Policy, released by the Dr K Kasturirangan Committee in March 2019, depicts a village school where a teacher is helping a studious-looking boy seated in front of a WiFi-enabled laptop. His younger counterpart, presumably learning through teaching aids, is seen playing with marbles in the same compound. Meanwhile, a girl and an older woman are seen under a red-tiled roof by the side, reading by themselves in their own shiny educational complex.

Undoubtedly, this idyllic scene would be a major leap from the existing reality of India's decrepit and crumbling education system. With some amendments brought in after massive protests by educationists, students, teachers, parents and a few state governments, this is also what is being promised by the final policy document which was adopted by the Council of Ministers in the central government on July 29, 2020.

Predictably, it has raised great expectations from a wide range of citizens. That such a policy renewal came 34 years after the last such exercise (NEP 1986) has created hope that the problems we face from a highly unequal educational hierarchy, increasingly disconnected from the life and labour that sustains crores of Indians, will now be looked into. A broad section of commentators, including those who are often critical of the ruling regime, have applauded the vision behind this document, while at most reserving judgment on the nitty-gritties of its execution.

Images are often quite distant from reality. A closer look at the document, as well as the track record of successive Indian governments in education, reveals that some of the very ideas that are causing much enthusiasm today, in fact, have very different meanings. It is not simply execution but also intent that must be held to scrutiny today. This is a tiny effort towards exposing such mistruths and to try to understand what awaits Indian citizens. Somewhere, it is also an effort towards imagining what Free, Equal and Scientific Education for All, as a right not a marketable commodity, will look like. It is an effort towards realizing the aspirations and ideals of the anti-colonial struggle for Liberation waged by the likes of Savitribai Phule, Bhagat Singh and countless martyrs.









## 1. Lifelong Learning

The very first page of NEP 2020 introduces, among its primary objectives, the promotion of 'lifelong learning opportunities for all'. This is in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. In its own words, as per demands emerging in the international market, it is imperative that young Indians 'not only learn but, more importantly, *learn how to learn*'.

One of the key components for this, is to promote application-based learning. For instance, section 4.27 states:

'Every student will take a fun course, during Grades 6-8, that gives a survey and hands-on experience of a sampling of important vocational crafts, such as carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc., as decided by States and local communities and as mapped by local skilling needs.'

Similarly, at all levels of education--from secondary to adult education--it emphasises the need to *Skill India* by providing competing online and offline options for lifelong 'upskilling', to be freely chosen by student-consumers.

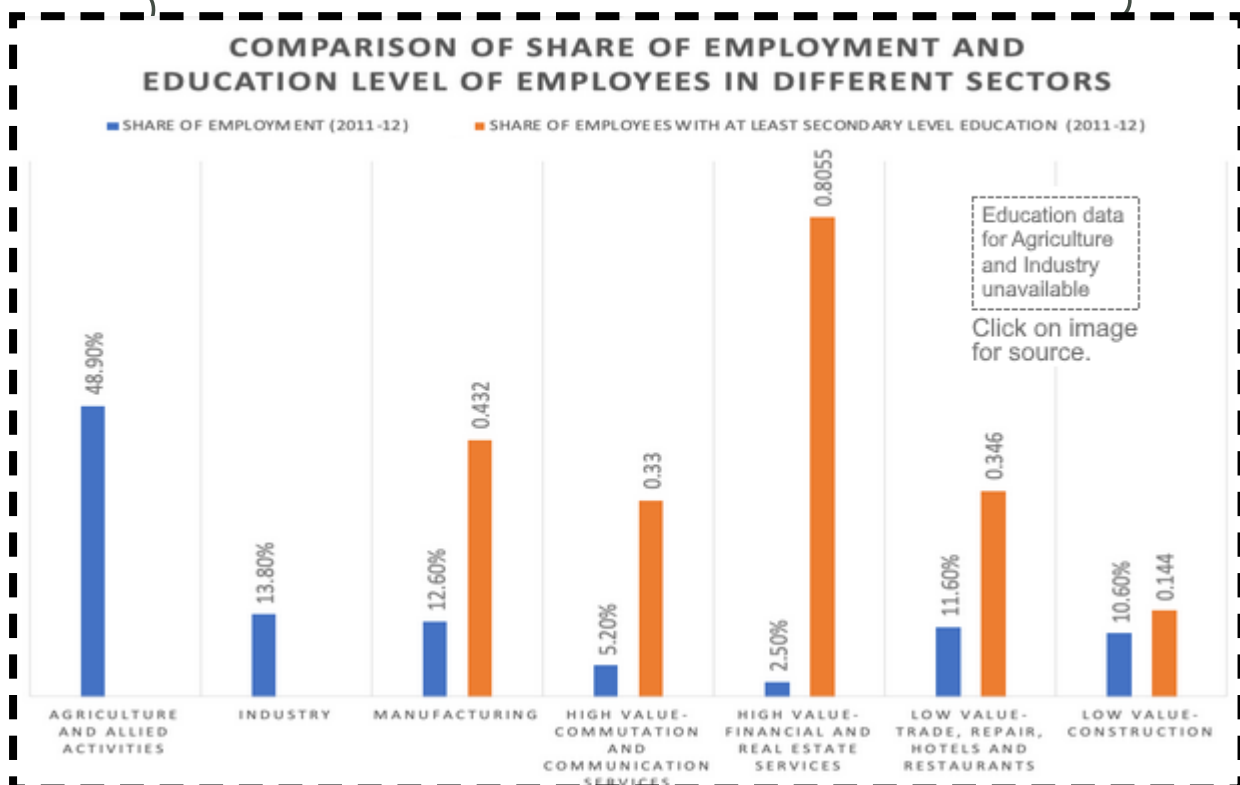
## Ask

- Which 'internship' will be chosen by an average Indian 11-year-old in Class 6?
- Will choice be free of the compulsions faced by working parents facing increasing 'informalization'?

### Unemployed Lifelong Learners

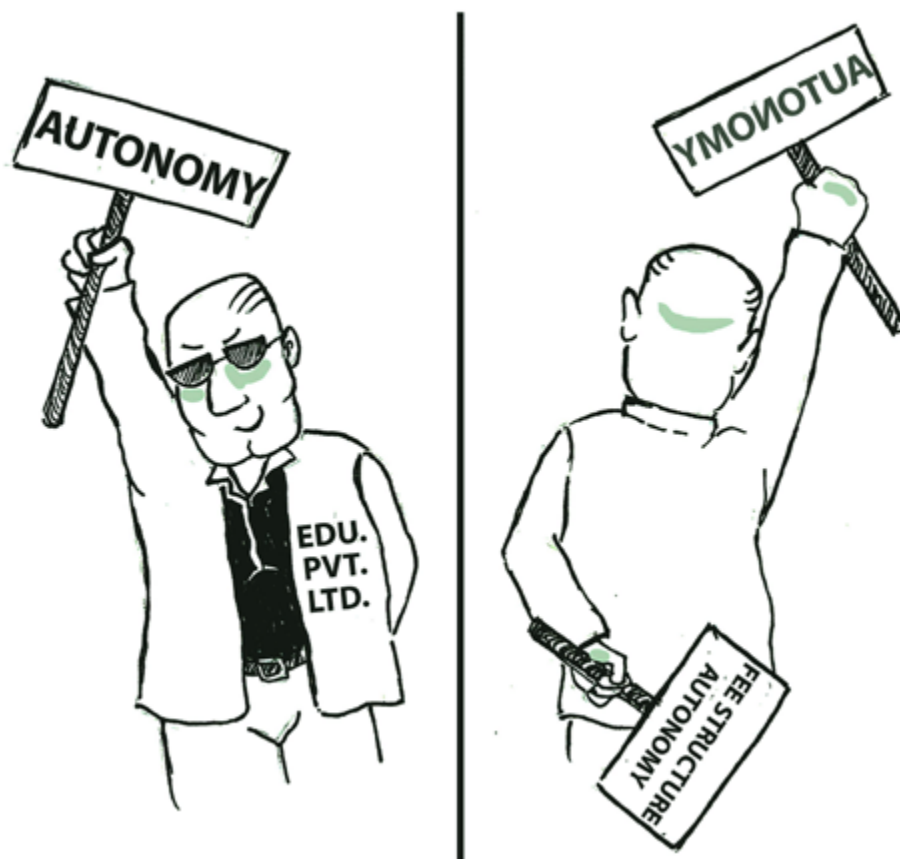
India is witnessing the highest rate of unemployment in over four decades. It is not labour that is scarce but demand for products and, consequently, productive employment. Even 'skilled' workers are struggling to get employment. The low value-added

continued on next page ...



service and construction sector in India, which relies on so-called ‘unskilled’ labour, employs about 22% of India’s working population. Added to this the bulk of ‘unskilled’ or ‘semi-skilled’ workers are employed in agriculture and manufacturing. These ‘unskilled’ and ‘semi-skilled’ workers constitute the majority of workers in our country. Emphasis on vocational training and internships for ‘skill enhancement’ in ‘carpentry, metal work, electric work etc.’ in NEP 2020 charts a straight route to solidifying this massive disparity between the precarious, unorganized sector and the high-value added services (such as IT and Finance) which employs only 7% of Indians.

As per the central government’s [own admission](#), ‘... efforts to encourage formalisation will be critical’ in reducing income inequality and generating dignified, quality employment. This is not possible without charting our independent course of development, militating against international pressure to offer the ‘cheapest labour’ for foreign investment-centric growth. In light of this, the MHRD’s insistence on increasing productivity in the Informal Sector in NEP 2020 essentially means [reproducing existing hierarchies in education and employment](#).



## 2. Autonomy

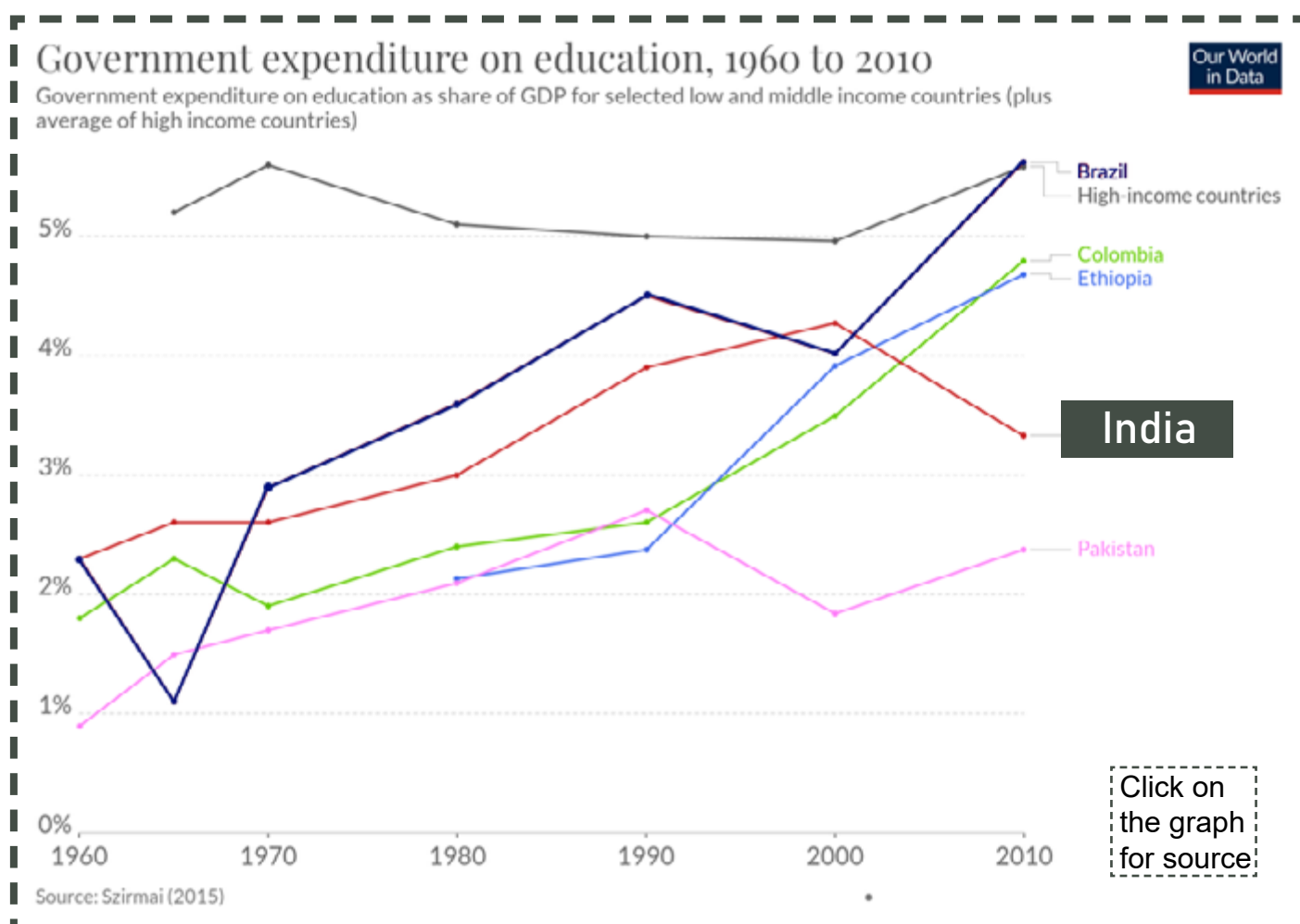
As per NEP 2020, higher education institutions (HEIs) will be divided into three tiers, as per NAAC rankings:

1. A small number of research universities (research-intensive universities, or RUs)
2. a slightly bigger pool to produce teachers (teaching-intensive universities, or TUs)
3. the mass of institutes for skill-training and vocational courses (autonomous degree-granting colleges, or ACs).

The first tier will be free to set up its campuses, introduce new 'self-financed' courses, hire faculty from foreign universities—provided that they **arrange their own revenue** while government funding is gradually withdrawn. Moreover, the bulk of existing public colleges with lower NAAC ranking will see fund cuts and eventually be shut down.

Since the publication of NITI Aayog's '3 year Action Agenda' (2017) and UGC's 'Graded Autonomy Regulations' (2018), 'autonomy' for HEIs has been spoken of repeatedly, including in NEP 2020. It is clear from the description above that **all 'autonomy' is conditional upon 'financial autonomy'**, also known as, fast-tracked privatisation.

The majority of Indian youth accesses higher education only until undergraduate courses and only a small section goes to do MA or research degrees. The NEP 2020, in its drive to make all HEIs autonomous, expressly states that the UG colleges of India need to become autonomous first. Effectively this means that **the bulk of Indian youth will be pushed to get education from market driven autonomous institutes.**



Countries across the world have seen a **massive reduction in public expenditure** on education since the 1990's. 78% of Indian colleges have already been **privatized**.



Moreover, **rankings are being used to justify the closure of 'low performing' public HEIs** ignores that they have suffered not from any innate, autonomous failure of their own but from deliberate governmental neglect in order to simultaneously prop up private profit-making in education.

### **'Ranking' breaks united struggles!**

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Since the entry of foreign direct investment (FDI) in higher education in 2002, a system of ranking public and private HEIs was introduced. Since 2016, the MHRD puts out annual NIRF rankings for public HEIs. However, the **parameters measured for ranking have little to do with people's needs and aspirations** and more with what is attractive for capital investment.

Gradually, the inequality between low and high-ranked universities solidified. Lowly-ranked institutions were the first to be defunded, thereby punishing students for the administrators' faults. Institutions on the upper end remained somewhat insulated at first. In this manner, public education as a whole was exposed to attack. Today, the few surviving so-called 'premier institutes' such as AIIMS, JNU, DU, IISc etc are also being dismantled.

**Instituting competition for the wrong ends was used by market fundamentalist forces to destroy public institutions.** Therefore, we must be wary when similar practices are now entrenched further under NEP 2020.



### 3. Multiple Exits

'In particular, students would continue to have the option of exiting after Grade 10 to pursue vocational or any other courses available in Grades 11-12 at a more specialised school if so desired.' (NEP 2020, section 4.2)

'Imaginative and flexible curricular structures will enable creative combinations of disciplines for study, and would offer multiple entry and exit points, thus removing currently prevalent rigid boundaries and creating new possibilities for life-long learning.' (section 11.5)

'The undergraduate degree will be of either 3-or 4-year duration, with multiple exit options within this period, with appropriate certifications, e.g., a certificate after completing 1 year in a discipline or field (including vocational and professional areas), or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelor's degree after a 3-year programme.' (section 11.9)

The above quotes are from the draft of NEP 2020. The 4 year undergraduate programme being introduced in this 'new' policy is merely a rehash of FYUP, which was fought back and revoked by a strong student-teachers movement in Delhi University, 2014. In this new programme, students will have three 'exit options' in the span of the 4 year course. **Who will exit after one year and who will stay for four is less a matter of choice and more a matter of existing structures of discrimination and exploitation.**



There is also an option to exit schooling in class 10th. According to policy makers, this 'exit option' exists to allow students to pursue specialised vocational courses at other schools. Effectively, it is **the big rate of drop-outs among the most marginalized and socio-economically backward in our country which is being disguised** as a voluntary exit from the education system. Most students will now have 4 years (given vocational integration from class 6) to 'hone' their vocational 'skills' and provide cheap labour to the capitalist class.

### Exclusion in numbers

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Data compiled by the All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) **shows that** despite consecutive governments' outward commitment to providing education to all in early education, out of the children admitted in Class 1, **only about 6% of STs, 8% of SCs, 9% of Muslims and 10% of OBCs are able to complete schooling till class 12.** This **massive exclusion from school as well as higher education is now being disguised** through terms like 'exit/entry options' and 'lifelong learning' and 'flexibility' in learning.





#### 4. Multidisciplinary

The NEP 2020 mentions the word 'multidisciplinary' at least 73 times. For instance, the word's usage includes:

1. Making the last four years of school (from Class 9 to 12) 'multidisciplinary', such that '**no hard separation** among 'curricular', 'extra-curricular', or 'co-curricular'; among 'arts', 'humanities', and 'sciences'; *or between 'vocational' or 'academic' streams*' [emphasis added].
2. Setting up MERUs (Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities) for the most advanced research and at least one 'multidisciplinary' HEI in each district by 2030.
3. 'Multidisciplinary curriculum' including 'credit-based courses', 'internships with local industry' to improve employability.



**In the first usage, the end to ‘hard separation’ in curriculum promised has been celebrated, with the expectation that the humanities will now receive greater attention.** This, however, is far from the reality.

Arts and natural sciences have been devalued, not by syllabus design, but by economic design—that is, due to the devaluation of fundamental research in India’s ‘development’ priorities. Instead, state-funded promotion of education and jobs in ‘applied’ social and natural sciences characterizes much of the underdeveloped world, including India, and has captured the aspirations of the middle class.

Societal perceptions regarding curricular/co-curricular and different streams in education will not change unless this linked aspect of Education-Employment are taken together.

NEP 2020’s focus on **‘Multidisciplinary’ learning is being promoted as providing a more comprehensive and holistic education to students**, who can now study physics with finance, history along with biology. For instance, standalone agricultural universities, which perform an essential public service, shall also now aim to become multidisciplinary.

However, in the past where such courses have been introduced, students have found that the curriculum has been unsuitable for in-depth learning. Under ‘modularization’, courses are fashioned into small, semester-long modules (which will now be implemented through MOOCs), imparting very narrow skills which are market-oriented, that students are free to ‘choose’

among. Gradually this has also led to subjects which are valued lower in the job market being discontinued or de-funded. This has reduced students' 'choice' instead of expanding it.

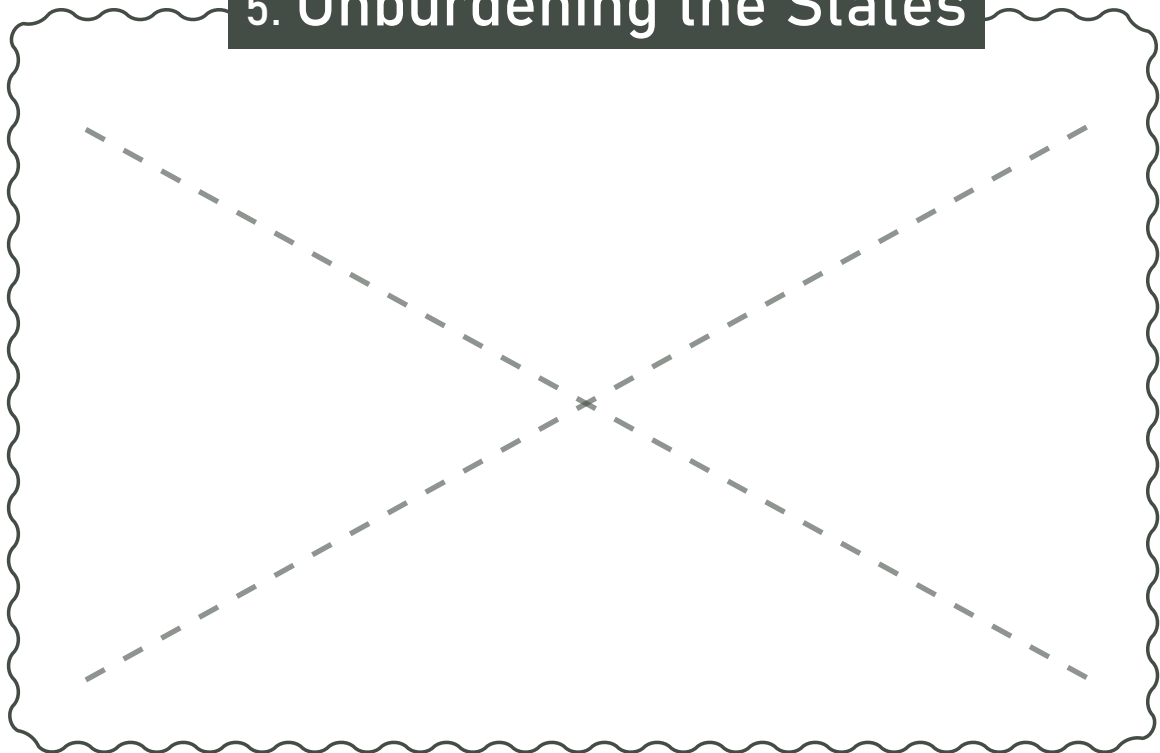
### **'Multidisciplinary' Disaster in DU's FYUP**

As discussed in the [previous section](#), the Four Year Undergraduate Programme, an unsuccessful neoliberal experiment attempted in Delhi University in 2013, exposed the perils of so-called multidisciplinary learning.

Students enthused by the prospect of exploring multiple fields discovered that a number of mandatory 'foundational courses'—basic skills that ought to have been taught in school, such as communications, computer literacy and so on—had been forced into their timetables. Someone 'choosing' to leave with a 2-year diploma under FYUP would get some basic education through 'foundational' courses and be placed lower in the hierarchy for employment as compared to one who can shell out the additional ₹1-2 lakh per annum to get a pass course degree or an honours degree. FYUP in one go strengthened the hierarchy between the BA pass course and BA honours degree and also created a lower third tier of the diploma, all in the name of 'multidisciplinary' learning.



## 5. Unburdening the States



*The section above has been left empty because NEP 2020 does not lay out any comprehensive framework to facilitate the democratic obligation, under the Concurrent List of the Constitution, related to power-sharing between Centre-State governments.*

Despite mentioning the need to increase public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP, NEP 2020 **does not clarify how much of this burden will be picked up by the union government** which collects 4% education cess on income. Moreover, the cost of expanding pre-primary education for ages 3 to 6 years will be borne by the severely underfunded *anganwadi* network that rests primarily with state governments.

**National Research Foundation (NRF) will take over all advanced research funding** from a range of overlapping institutions. Now the highest decision-making body for advanced research funding, it will be led by a Board of Governors almost wholly nominated by the central government. Similarly, the **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) is slated to take over the role of UGC, AICTE and other bodies** and will also have 12 government appointees, of whom only two will be academics. Previously, a Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog headed by the Prime Minister and MHRD had been proposed for these roles but had to be dropped after [opposition from state governments](#).

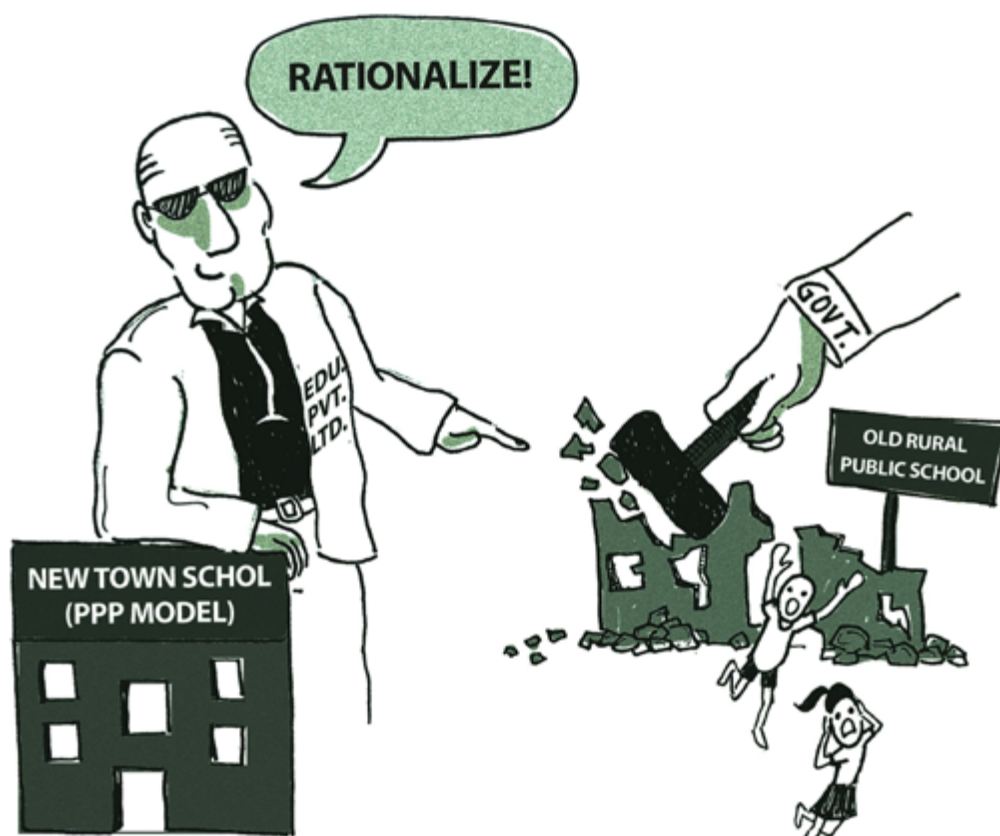
In 2016, the BJP government had [proposed to revive the colonial Indian Education Service \(IES\)](#). This cadre of bureaucrats under the central government was

poised to take over all administrative and academic decision-making in Indian universities, despite all contrary claims of granting more ‘autonomy’.

**Indian education has consistently gone through a process of centralization.** At the time of the first National Education Policy (1968), decision-making in education remained wholly under the ambit of state governments. By the next NEP (1986), it had been moved to the Concurrent List, open to certain kinds of intervention from the central government.

**The federal character of India, as a ‘Union of States’ under the Constitution, has come under strain in recent years** due to moves such as the centralization of taxation powers under GST, abrogation of special protections to states and, most recently, several vetoes exercised by the centre against non-BJP states over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. NEP 2020 continues this anti-federal tendency, favours the domination of Hindi-speaking, populous states in central and northern India and propagates the Sangh Parivar’s version of India—all in the name of ‘national integration’.





## 6. School Mergers

On one hand, NEP 2020 promises to universalize Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) by 2030. Anganwadis as well as professional teachers, it claims, will have a crucial role to play in this. Thus, it would entail an expansion of the school system.

Simultaneously, it points that, according to U-DISE 2016-17 data, nearly 28% of India's Public Primary Schools and 14.8% of India's Upper Primary school have less than 30 students, thereby making these small schools 'economically suboptimal' and 'operationally complex'. It recommends 'grouping or rationalising schools', an apparent contraction of the school system.

## Shutting schools

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Jharkhand's Department of Education, advised by Boston Consulting Group, a multinational private consultancy appointed by NITI Aayog, had proposed to 'merge' 6,000 schools in the state in 2019. Following this, 4,600 primary schools set up in the early-2000s have been shut down in two phases. (A third wave was stalled when BJP MPs objected, acknowledging that school closures affect students.) These mergers grossly violated the RTE Act 2009 which mandates a primary school within a radius of 1 km of every child. Similar school mergers in then BJP-led Rajasthan, in 2014-16, reduced enrollment across deprived social groups (ST, SC and OBC) by around 6%.

Boston Consulting Group's breaking down of primary schools shifted a major part of early child-rearing onto *anganwadis*.

## Hollowing out *anganwadis*

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Anganwadi workers have struggled for years demanding to be recognised as workers and as government employees. This makes them eligible for a monthly minimum wage of Rs. 18,000, in accordance to the 7th Pay Commission. Despite performing work of a permanent nature, anganwadi workers and 'helpers' are still recognised as 'honorary volunteers'.

Wages and rations owed to workers being delayed by two to six months is also widely reported across *anganwadis* in Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Meanwhile, *anganwadis* in urban slums are also left to operate in unhygienic or cramped conditions unfit for pre-natal and early childhood care. These realities add up to show that anganwadis are not equipped at present to handle the added educational burden proposed by NEP 2020 in addition to pre-natal and early childcare.

The promised objectives of this policy document cannot be fulfilled without radically changing how the government treats teachers.

**Instead, after devoting page after page to training and dignity for teachers, NEP 2020 remains mum on the existential threat of ‘contractualization’ to the teaching profession.** ‘Para-teachers’ on contract have been given the guise of ‘local teacher’, ‘local expert’, ‘local volunteer’ and so on in NEP 2020.

On one hand NEP claims that arbitrary teacher transfers must end to build stable classroom bonds (section 5.3), while on the other it will now allow teachers to be shuffled between a number of schools grouped under ‘school complexes’ (section 5.4).

Reading between the lines, greater precarity, undignified working conditions and insufficient pay seems to await Indian teachers under NEP.



## 7. Digital – Distance Education

‘While education will play a critical role in this transformation, technology itself will play an important role in the improvement of educational processes and outcomes; thus, the relationship between technology and education (at all levels) is bi-directional.’ (NEP 2020, section 23.1)

## WhatsApp Universities: A timeline

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2000

Birla - Ambani  
Report on  
Reforms in  
Education

A committee representing Big Industry advocates for the **greater involvement of technocrats, technological finance and MNCs** such as IBM, Microsoft, Wipro and Amazon in education. Proposes a 'user pays' model in education.

Apr, 2017

NITI Aayog's  
Three Year  
Action Agenda

Recommends focussing on using technology and starting Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to **ramp up formal enrolment** in education

May, 2017

KPMG - Google  
Report on On-  
line Education

Two of the world's largest finance consultancies and tech giants collaborate to bring out a report projecting that the **online education 'market' in India will grow 8 times** in the next five years. It also has a special section on online standardised tests and online test preparation, the market for which will grow to be 11 billion US dollars according to KPMG estimates.

Jul - Nov,  
2017

MHRD begins work on an online platform called SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) Central which offers MOOCs covering all advanced education, high school and 'skill sector' courses. A few months later, National Testing Agency, a specialised, autonomous body for conducting standardised, computer-based exams is established.





May 1, 2020

In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, facing widespread resistance from students and state governments to Online Exams, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that online education will be the biggest component of the upcoming NEP.

Jul 6, 2020

A few days later, the Ministry of Home Affairs under Amit Shah intervenes to make online exams compulsory for final year students of all universities.

CBSE is allowed to partner with IBM to integrate AI curriculum. Reported that at least seven Indian HEIs have started using Amazon Web Services' 'Cloud curricula' in syllabi.

July 29, 2020

The NEP 2020 is adopted by Cabinet, which has a separate section added to the earlier draft dealing exclusively with online and digital education.

The process of the steam rolling in 'Digital-Distance Education' over the last three years has been concluded with the NEP 2020. Done in the name of increasing Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, online education of the sorts proposed will only formalize exclusion. **Instead of technology supplementing a radical vision of equality and social justice, education will now be parcelled into small-modules for skill-training and the majority exiting with**

**online certificates/diplomas will work in low-paying, highly exploitative jobs.** On one hand, now fewer faculty will be recruited and standardised curriculum will be further distanced from people's real concerns. On the other, a huge market will be created to make profit from the aspirations of a huge number of young people to get some kind of formal higher education.

**The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that Digital-Distance Education increases existing social hierarchies and automatically excludes a large section from equal participation.** If the foundational pillars of this policy are access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability, the Cabinet Ministers should have considered NSSO 2017-18 data which shows that only around 8% Indian students have both computers and home-based internet access. The numbers are even lower in rural areas, among Dalit, Adivasis and Muslims and do not show the added disadvantages faced by Persons with Disabilities (PwD students) even with internet access. The push towards 'coding', digital literacy, computational thinking, mathematics for artificial intelligence, machine learning and data science without public investment in basic digital equipment reveals that citizens' interests are not at the centre of this policy.

NEP 2020 also celebrates a 'Minimum Human Interface'. In a conspicuous attempt to promote this, inspections conducted by regulatory bodies will now be replaced by online 'self disclosure' based lucid systems. The proposed National Educational Technology Forum is also another step in that direction. **This displays a conservative shift towards technocratic policy-making.** It reduces the space for democratic consultation, erodes right-based demands over education and is unconcerned with questions of access, scientific curriculum and social justice.



## 8. World Class Universities

Existing state-funded Indian universities will now receive a makeover. They will become 'world class' and 'multidisciplinary' like American Ivy League universities, Harvard and MIT—by being replaced by them. NEP 2020 promises to bring in legislation that will allow, for the first time, 'select' foreign universities to be treated 'on par with other autonomous institutions'. Students will be permitted to undergo a part of their course by taking 'credits' from such foreign universities.

In 2020, the government eased restrictions on foreign investments in education to encourage foreign direct investment (FDI) and external commercial borrowings (ECBs) in education. This will allow ‘[select](#)’ [foreign universities](#) to open Indian campuses.

In effect, the objective of NEP will be to ease both fund flow to India and institutional collaboration in such a way that a **foreign educational player investing in India will be allowed to take back earnings made here**. In other words, higher education will become just another commodity for profit-making.

While this is being done in the name of ‘higher quality education’, no cap on tuition fees or how powerful multinational investors will be regulated has been mentioned in NEP 2020. This foretells a future where HEIs become even more inaccessible for the average Indian.



## 9. Merit

The NEP 2020 acknowledges that only 0.69% of India's GDP is invested in research (section 17.3). 'Increased Funding for diverse research and innovation across Sciences and Humanities' ought to then come as a relief. A National Research Foundation (NRF), created under the central government, will 'competitively fund' advanced research.

'High stake' school exams will be eliminated. Students will have a number of more frequent, 'standardised' tests throughout the year that may be evaluated using Artificial Intelligence and evaluate anonymised 'learning outcomes', only to improve school functioning. Board exams at the end of senior secondary schooling will no longer be stressful, with multiple options to improve one's grade.

## What does 'Merit' mean?

Research funding will become contingent on whether it receives the NRF's acceptance, instead of university faculty's alone. A Board of Governors, consisting overwhelmingly of the ruling regime's nominees will decide such allocations and serve as a 'liaison between researchers... government as well as industry.'

In 2018-19, students from the Scheduled Castes enrolled in higher education fell short of the mandated quota (of 15%) as did Scheduled Tribe enrolment (mandated at 7.5%). Of the top 10 universities in the country, as per the National Institute Ranking Framework, just three have 22.5% of SC/ST students and another three have over half of all women students (AISHE 2018-19). **NEP 2020 makes no reference to Constitutionally-mandated Social Justice norms, such as reservations for historically oppressed castes and tribes, to remedy this unequal representation.**

NEP promotes a clear shift towards an American model of 'tenure track' positions where one secures tenure or permanent employment after certain years of completing 'quality' teaching and research (section 13.6). This means that beyond teaching hours, **professorship will now be contingent on meeting a number of bureaucratic requirements** as well as constantly maintaining the mandated number of peer-review publications, seminar appearances and so on, with lesser regard for research quality.

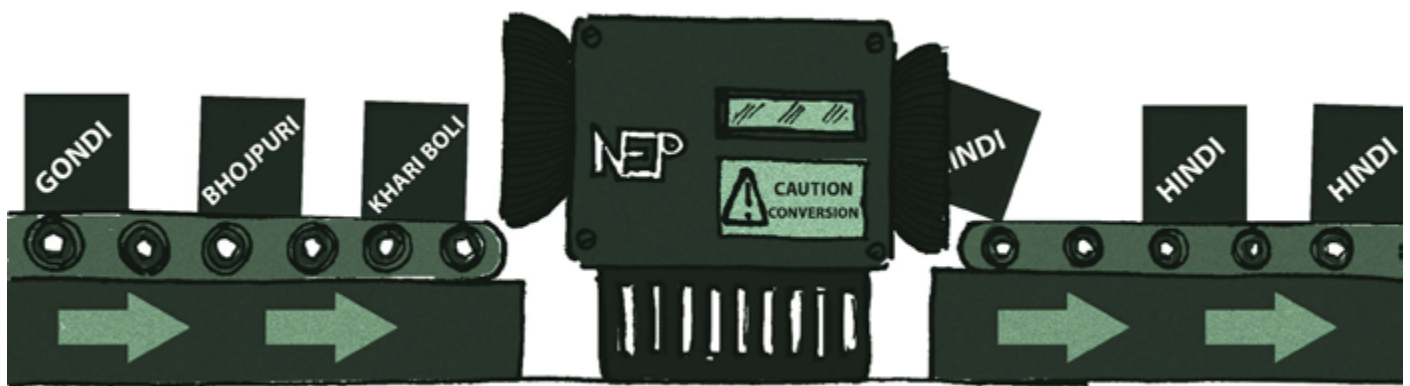


### Case Study: 'Standardised Testing' Experience in the US Model

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In the US, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act envisaged improvement in cognitive test scores for working class children to remove unemployment. In 1973, it found that for white females and for blacks, there was no apparent relation between reading proficiency and earnings. What was evaluated was based on a narrow set of criteria designed to maximise profits from the testing itself. However, **linking standardised testing to school funding increased, rather than decreased, students' 'stakes' for performing well in tests.** A stagnation of the schooling system as a whole, with wider socio-economic structures reproducing themselves in test results and the funds allocated to schools, was found. Such an experiment is being sought to be replicated in India today through frequent, 'anonymised' testing in schools.

Under NEP 2020, in addition to the pressure of frequent, standardised tests, **high-stake exams have also been retained in the form of common entrance exams for higher education.** This will be centralised like never before under the National Testing Agency (NTA). It will be this MCQ-based score that will decide the trajectory of students' higher education, providing an opportunity to be exploited by private coaching centres.



## 10. Mother Tongue Learning

### [New Education Policy]

**Continuation of the three language formula in schools:** The three language formula, followed since the adoption of the National Policy on Education 1968, and endorsed in the National Policy on Education 1986/1992 as well as the NCF 2005, will be continued, keeping in mind the Constitutional provisions and aspirations of the people, regions, and the Union.

### [National Policy on Education, 1986/92]

8.7 The Education Policy of 1968 had examined the question of the development of languages in great detail; its essential provisions can hardly be improved upon and are as relevant today as before. The implementation of this part of the 1968 Policy has, however, been uneven. The Policy will be implemented more energetically and purposefully.

### [National Policy on Education, 1968]

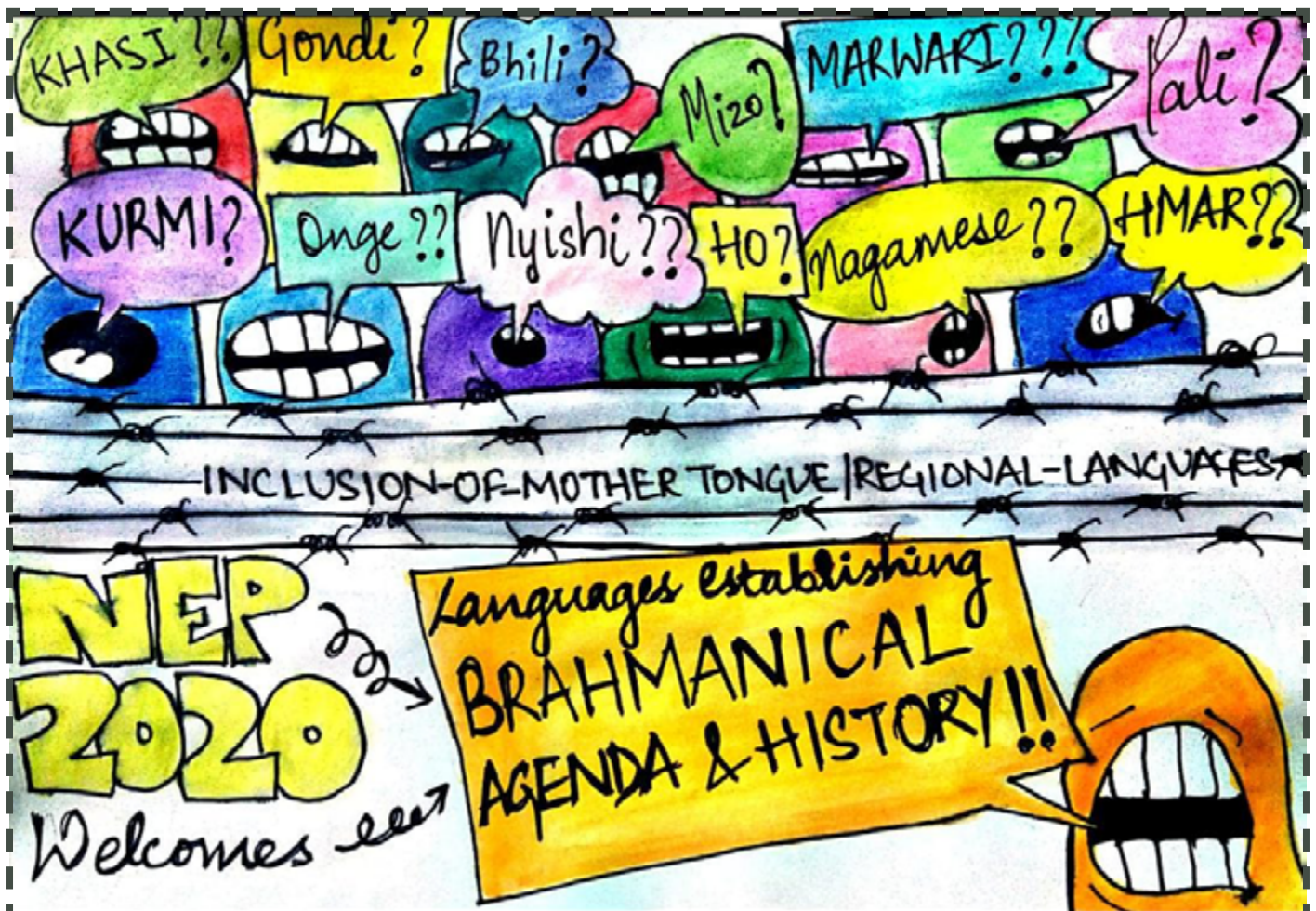
(b) Three-Language Formula: At the secondary stage, the State Governments should adopt, and vigorously implement, the three-language formula which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking States, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the Non-Hindi-speaking States. Suitable courses in Hindi and/or English should also be available in universities and colleges with a view to improving the proficiency of students in these languages up to the prescribed university standards.

Click image for source



**‘Three Language formula’ in school education has been a source of long-standing controversy.** It has been seen as a way to impose Hindi all over India. In the first National Education Policy (1968), ‘multilingual schooling’ had been proposed by state governments, as education was then a State subject then in the Constitution. Now, formally a Concurrent List subject, NEP 20 pushes towards further centralization.

The policy consists of suggestions to support education in home languages and mother tongues, which are, languages listed in the 8th Schedule—that is, languages with a formal script. This marginalizes thousands of other Indian languages. Without also expanding funding and opportunities for higher education/research in various languages across disciplines, this may become a major backdoor instrument for the ruling dispensation to politically manoeuvre the aspirations of linguistic minorities for narrow electoral gains without ensuring actual scope for education or employment.



Privileging Sanskrit within the Classical languages in the document makes it possible to make Sanskrit the *de facto* Indian Classical language, funded and propagated disproportionately at the national level compared to Prakrit, Pali or Persian. Through such national promotion, it can serve as a platform

**The language policy in NEP 2020, which has been a matter of much debate, has been received in the sense that the government is pushing away students from learning English. The actual case, however, seems more complicated.** The document suggests that Mother Tongue or local language ought to be adopted 'where possible'. This indicates that while getting actualized, the present Dual Education system will remain in place, where the rich get high quality education, be it in English or vernacular-medium schools, where they can learn English (even if it happens at a later stage) but the opposite happens to the poor and historically oppressed sections of society with no cultural exposure to English.



## 11. Indian Knowledge Systems

'The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this Policy. The pursuit of knowledge (*gyaan*), wisdom (*pragyaa*), and truth (*satya*) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the loftiest human goal. The aim of education in ancient India was not just the acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life in this world, or life beyond schooling, but for complete realisation and liberation of the self.' (NEP 2020, Introduction)



The NEP 2020 repeatedly emphasises the role of ‘tradition’ and ‘Indian values’ in shaping education curriculum. It emphasises the need to integrate traditional ‘knowledge systems’, or ways of knowing and learning, with modern curricula matching ‘world standards’.

However, reading between the lines, what is most alarming is the anti-science bias that pervades this call for revival: by positioning ‘Indian knowledge systems’ as opposed to modern, ‘western’ ways of knowing, **NEP 2020 mystifies the scientific bases of the subcontinent’s history of learning**. Moreover, for all its talk about ‘integrating’ both together, it remains silent on the question of ramping up investment in indigenous research in medicine, sciences, literature and cultural advancement.

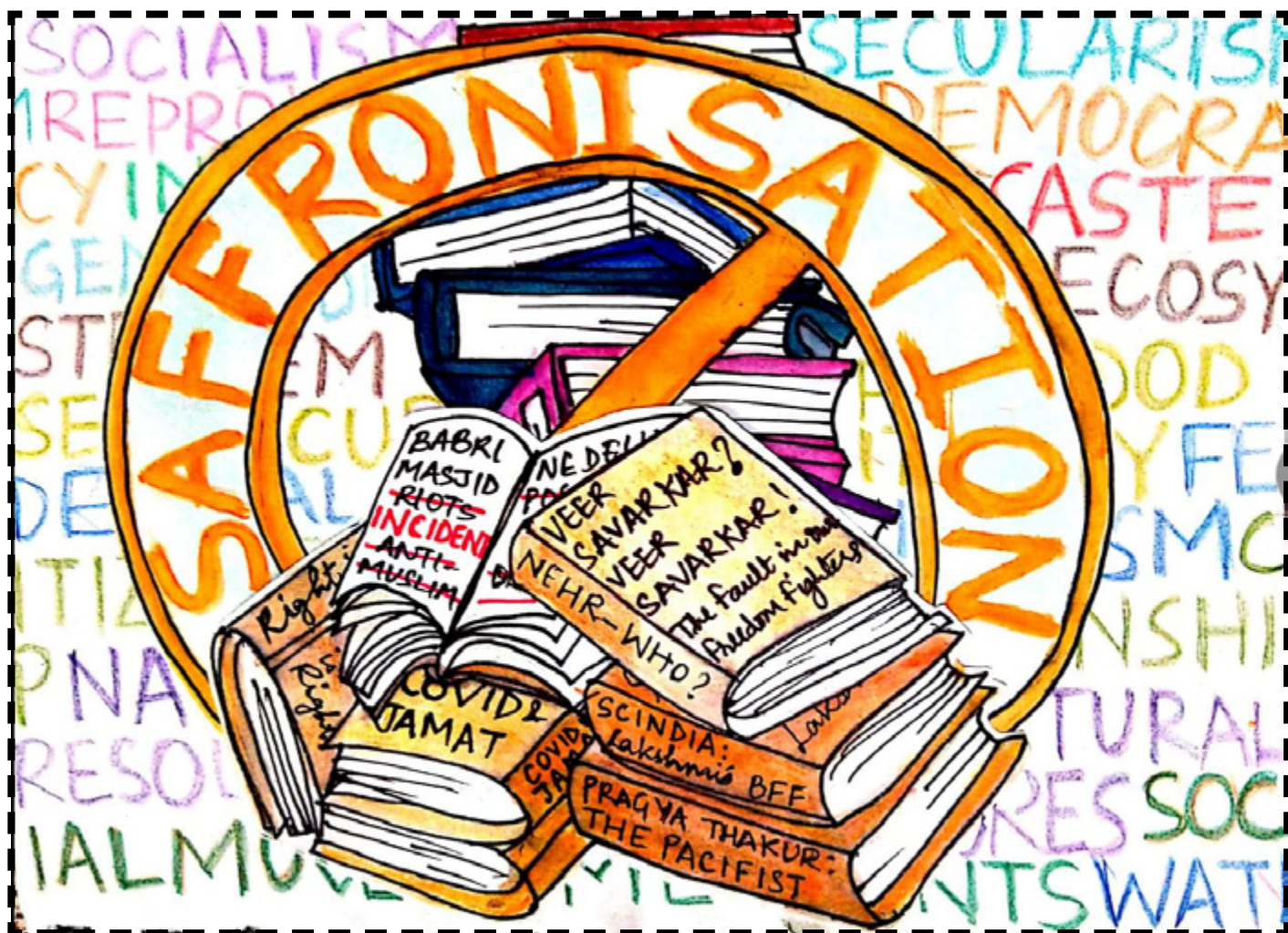
### Reading between the lines

.....

The Sangh continues its agenda of bringing parity between AYUSH and Medical degrees alone, not in actual scientific research into each:

‘... our healthcare education system must be integrative - this would mean, illustratively, that all students of allopathic medical education must have a basic understanding of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), and vice versa.’ (NEP 2020, section 17.5)





On one hand, NEP 2020 talks of reviving glorious traditions of Indian learning, on the other, it is **completely subservient to imperialist interests in education, constantly talking about the need to replicate the USA's hierarchical Ivy League system** and allowing more FDI in education.

This is mere lip service to Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Yoga and so on. It may sensationalize the Sangh's ideological agenda, but ultimately, **offers little of the much needed public investment** in advancing historically developed knowledge systems in India, from Charvak and Sushrut to Nalanda and Takshashila.

## Postscript

### On how to read a policy document

The revised draft of NEP 2020, adopted by the Cabinet without democratic deliberation in either house of the Parliament, has seen enthusiastic support from a sizable section of personalities who are often known to be critical of the present ruling dispensation. From electoral opponents such as Shashi Tharoor, Yogendra Yadav and Chandrababu Naidu to popular opinion-makers such as journalist Rajdeep Sardesai and virtual celebrities Dhruv Rathee and ‘Deshbhakt’ Akash Banerjee, many have supported the broad thrust of this change in the education system while holding marginal reservations.

This raises important questions, not just on this policy document, but on how any policy document should be read and responded to. Should not a policy document be read in the context of who is bringing it, what are their stated agendas and how such words have turned out in actuality in the past? The present NEP 2020, even in good faith, assuming that the government will indeed stick to its words,

retains several fundamental flaws.

For instance, the government might come up with a vision document claiming that today's environmental laws are 'outdated' and in need of 'reform', so as to make them 'flexible', 'time-bound' and 'friendly' to 'all sections of society'. It might claim that now, we must utilize our resources to equip the nation to 'compete in the global arena'. Given consecutive governments' history of ecological devastation, one might conclude that 'flexibility' and 'friendliness' for 'all sections' would mean big multinationals being given a freer hand to circumvent the norms of clearance, compliance and impact assessment, in the name of 'development projects', to the ultimate detriment of the environment. Is it not clear that the forests, mountains and rivers, which they may claim are 'lying idle', will now be sold off to big business houses in the name of 'utilizing resources' and bringing 'development'?

**Whenever a policy document is to be critically appreciated, it needs to be seen in its context...**

.....

Or, say for instance, if similar sentences are written for labour law 'reforms', is our experience

with such changes

over the last three decades not enough to clarify that the government intends to further ramp up contractualization of labour, loosen safety requirements for industry, make employers free from their social security obligations and so on. Should we then choose to appreciate the intent of such environmental or labour policies and later criticize its actualization?

One need not even be a ‘crazy Communist’, have a ‘negative outlook’ or be part of an ‘anti-national conspiracy’ to understand this. The question here is not just about the ‘intentions’ of the ruling establishment and their history of putting up nice but deceptive, empty words to disguise their aims. Whenever a policy document is to be critically appreciated, it needs to be seen in its context, seen for what possible shape it will take when it is realized in a society riven by large structural inequalities along different axes.

One method is to see what shape it takes for the ‘under privileged’ and whether the policy uplifts them in absolute and relative terms with respect to the privileged. In other words, the impact of the policy must be evaluated in terms of whether it will decrease existing inequality or increase it. But such a method of looking at policy becomes an agenda only if we are convinced that ‘inequality’ is bad, not just for the under privileged but for the progress of our entire society and country. We would argue that there has been a shift in the discourse in this aspect and hence many are complacent in reducing this aspect of structural inequality to mere ‘implementation issues’ of an otherwise progressive policy.

Indeed, a ‘bold change’ in our present education system has been an urgent requirement. It has been long-awaited by the toiling and oppressed sections of Indian society and by progressive students, teachers, educationists and citizens. The changes to be brought by NEP 2020, however, are the opposite of



what has been expected. In this booklet, so far, we have presented an analysis of the different aspects of the policy, decoding the words in the document itself. Here, in this afterword, we will focus on two unsaid but fundamental assumptions that are driving NEP's policy makers and their enthusiastic supporters.

The first assumption behind this push for early vocational education is the following. It is assumed that the lack of adequate/appropriate skill within India's labour force is the primary cause of India not becoming able to attract investment from domestic and foreign Big Capital and for the lack of 'economic growth'. Through vocational training from late childhood and an extensive skill development program, India will be able to harness its 'demographic dividend' (that is, the fact that we currently have a young population) and will become a hub of cheap,

<p><b>Where will these skilled workers ... get employed? .....</b></p>	<p>skilled labour. This will lead to foreign/domestic capital investment, therefore, 'economic growth' and 'development' in the country.</p>
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But the reason for foreign direct investment (in productive sectors) in India remaining low is not due to the lack of skilled labour. The domestic market too is not suffering from any lack of labour supply given the huge labor-surplus in our economy but from a lack of aggregate demand. So, the question remains: even if we do enhance 'marketable skills' among young people, who is going to buy those skills? Or, simply, where will these skilled workers

(now burdened under student loans) get employed? Thousands of those who are already skilled in these sectors are getting retrenched or not finding dignified employment. In economic terms, the policy is aimed at 'supply side' management, which will not mitigate an economic problem which lies mostly on the 'demand side'.

There is an added layer to the problem in the first assumption. In this framework of development through investment of domestic/international big capital, the terms of winning the 'investors' confidence' in 'developing countries' like ours is its ability to offer the cheapest labour and give away its natural resources at throwaway prices. The point is, even if India is able to win this game of pleasing investors over other backward nations, the future of our country and its young population will remain doomed.

Proponents of NEP 2020 are relying on an ahistorical understanding of economics. They hide the fact that countries with a history of colonial exploitation like ours have been able to grow economically only if they have made rapid advances in primary and secondary education for the whole populace, made a robust indigenous base of higher education, including research, and thereby secured a foothold in the scientific and technological fields. Only then have they been able to integrate themselves in the global economy on their own terms. The upper ten percent of society, in any underdeveloped country like ours, aspires to integrate themselves more closely with the global elite because they are, to an extent, a direct beneficiary of this economic model.



Among the remaining ninety percent, for whom an opportunity for upward mobility has opened only formally, some are ardently supporting such an economic and educational

model. But it is historically proven that for the overwhelming majority, these dreams of upward mobility will never get actualized in the existing neoliberal model. Rather a substantial section will get further pauperized and entrapped in debt.

In 1966, the Kothari Commission argued for a Common School System in every locality ...

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This brings us to the second unsaid assumption that is shared by the document and its enthusiastic supporters. This is regarding the assumption of formal-juridical equality between members of a group in a society fraught with rising inequality, discrimination and segregation. In 1966, the Kothari Commission argued for a Common School System in every locality, virtually arguing that any student, whether the daughter of a Prime Minister or a daily-wage worker, would get the same schooling. The standard of all schools would be improved and the rich and

The argument for public-funded education was not conceived as 'taking care of the under-privileged'.

.....

powerful will not be able to maintain their exclusive, elite schools. The assumption behind this was that unless we provide an equal opportunity for all children, they will be left to repeat the histories of their families.

Their socio-economic conditions will constrain their development. Nice pleasantries like 'choice', 'flexibility' and 'multiple exits' are indeed beautiful ways

for the state to shirk off its responsibility to providing proper and comprehensive education for all, at least till secondary level.

The argument for public-funded education was not conceived as ‘taking care of the under-privileged’. Rather, it was understood as the way forward for the progress of a nation, in line with earlier anti-colonial struggle. It is a fact that only if everybody is given equal opportunity, which includes policies of positive discrimination like reservation and other policies in favour of the marginalized, that the best of the cumulative capabilities of the nation can be brought out and then there can be a more level playing field for students to choose courses and employment. A robust public education would be the way for rebuilding the nation from the wounds of colonial plunder—economically, intellectually and morally.

That did not happen in our country. The egalitarian aspirations of the anti-colonial struggle had pushed the governments to ensure a minimum of public-funded schooling and higher education, a few scholarships, cheap hostels, libraries, laboratories and so on. These, coupled with policies of reservation, played a positive role in beginning to draw in a section of the marginalized into the arena of higher education. The reversal of such policies started much earlier and is speeding up now like never before.

In a starkly unequal society like ours, it is not hard to imagine what will happen if kids (effectively their parents) are given an ‘opportunity to choose’ their

career trajectory at the age of 11-14, how that ‘choice’ will be made in reality. Ours is a society where the reality of ‘choice’ is that most people from oppressed castes still end up doing low-paid manual jobs. Patriarchy is so deeply entrenched and dominant over the mobility and sexuality of women that it cripples the aspirations of most women at an early stage, particularly for women from toiling sections. Undoubtedly, the marginalized sections will bear the brunt of

... public discourse is being shifted from the paradigm of *equality* to a paradigm of *survival of the fittest* this policy, where effectively, state-funding for a robust and comprehensive schooling for all will recede further.

.....

The demand for a common public education is not just for creating a more level playing field for students from diverse backgrounds. It is also for making future citizens aware of the real history and culture of their region, nation and the world, which is integral to the imagination of an informed citizenry and hence of any substantive democracy.

A reversal from this direction is also apparent globally. A new consensus is being forced upon us, in the garb of the argument that private competition will enhance the quality of education. A shift in paradigm, from ‘substantive equality’ to a mere ‘formal equality’, is visible in policy discourse. More precisely, public discourse is being shifted from the paradigm of *equality* to a paradigm of *survival of the fittest*. This is not happening due to any sudden change in ‘human rationality’ itself. The neoliberal economic model is hegemonic over society not by

virtue of its inherent strength or superior economic rationality. Rather, it is a result of the balance of forces between labour and capital tilting towards capital over the last few decades and the strength of progressive forces worldwide diminishing.

Pressure from the international Communist movement, from workers-peasants' struggles and anti-colonial, anti-race, anti-patriarchal movements worldwide and the anti-caste struggles in India during the first few decades of the twentieth century beat capitalism into a particular form. To a limited degree, it won workplace protections and social welfare, the rights of local communities over common resources, political freedoms for the individual, a representative-democratic state, norms against social discrimination and a degree of fraternity across nations. The brute force and ideology of capitalism was arm-twisted into coming to terms with the norms of a 'humane society', or rather, these pressures from below built what we know today as a 'humane society'. Capitalism today has been liberated from the baggage of remaining 'humane'. It is not shying away from happily marrying with fascist social forces to mitigate its crisis.

For a startling contrast, it would not be difficult to imagine that the previous generation of so-called 'liberals' in India, like D S Kothari who dared to draft the policy of the Common School System (mentioned above) in 1966, would today find their ideas

being called ‘radical’, ‘Communist-like’ or ‘crazy’ by the same people who think of themselves as liberal. Unfortunately, they have internalized that they must retain the middle-ground, distant from either extreme. If they have criticized four government policies, they feel compelled to defend the fifth and reclaim their ‘neutrality’. With the consensus shifting to the right, those seeking to find a middle-ground in policy debates have had to shift rightward periodically. ‘Liberal’—which has become an all-purpose, denunciatory category in our country today—must have the strength to withstand not just verbal and physical attacks by the far-Right forces but also to stand tall and lose friends who are aspiring to join the global elite, if indeed they still choose to stand with the principles of ‘Liberty’, ‘Equality’ and ‘Fraternity’.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which women and men deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

— Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

This handbook has been compiled by

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*Towards building an independent,  
revolutionary students' movement!*

Strengthen the movement for  
Free, Equal and Scientific  
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